

Madam Speaker, tonight I rise with the sad honor of recognizing the retirement of my friend, colleague, Congressman Jim Oberstar. He has served the residents of Minnesota's Eighth Congressional District with distinction for more than 36 years. Jim is the dean of the Minnesota congressional delegation, and all of us, House and Senate, are deeply grateful for his commitment to our State.

To many people in Washington, DC, he is Chairman James L. Oberstar of the powerful Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, but to most Minnesotans, he is Jim Oberstar from Chisholm, the heart of Minnesota's Iron Range. For those of you who don't know about the Iron Range, it can be a tough place to grow up--lots of cold weather and a lot of hard work.

But it has lots of great people. The hard lessons of his early years served Jim well in Washington. He knew how to fight for people and causes that he served, and he always worked for progress in a way that honored his principles.

During his time in Congress, Jim made a career out of creating good jobs and building America. His priority was investing in the future prosperity of his country, literally laying the foundation of a 21st-century American economy, and I am proud to say he has been my partner in building a modern transportation system in the Twin Cities.

Next month, major renovations on the Union Depot in St. Paul, a modern multi-modal transportation hub, will create 3,000 construction jobs. Only months later, construction begins on the Central Corridor, the light rail between St. Paul and Minneapolis, creating thousands of more jobs. Neither of these major investments would have been happening without Jim Oberstar. He had the vision to plan for the future.

He has also demonstrated his leadership in times of great crisis, and he has been effective. On August 1, 2007, the Interstate 35W bridge collapsed in Minneapolis and 13 people lost their lives. The Chairman raced to action and helped to secure emergency legislation that rebuilt the bridge, reconnected our communities.

But he didn't stop there. Chairman Oberstar worked in Congress to call attention to the epidemic of weak bridges all across this country, and he made bridge repair and replacement a focus of the Recovery Act. Because of Jim Oberstar's commitment, thousands of bridges across this country were replaced or rebuilt through the Recovery Act. Millions of Americans are safer today because Chairman Oberstar recognized Minnesota's tragedy was an American crisis.

Jim Oberstar not only served; he served well. He not only worked hard; he achieved results. He was a true ranger. His roots of loyalty to the needs of working families in Minnesota and across this country could not be beat. This institution is about to lose a great leader, but it is inheriting a legacy of commitment and fairness and professionalism that should serve as a model for all of us.

On behalf of myself and the Minnesotans I represent, I extend my thanks and my best wishes to Chairman Jim Oberstar. Madam Speaker, at this point I will insert in the Record various letters

in support of Chairman Oberstar; from Congressman Erik Paulsen, Congresswoman Betsy Markey, State Representative Tommy Rukavina, State Senator Tom Saxhaug, State Senator Tom Bakk, State Senator David Tomassoni, the Honorable Don Ness, Mayor of the City of Duluth, the Honorable Christopher Coleman, the Mayor of the City of Saint Paul, and the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and their Rail Authority.

[remarks from various Members of Congress]

We've heard many, many wonderful things about Jim Oberstar, and we have many, many people present today who love and who've worked with him. And we are here as a delegation, strong and proud members of Minnesota's Farmer Democratic Labor Party; and that comes as no surprise that Jim fought hard for working people.

As has been pointed out, he comes from the Iron Range. He worked in an iron mine in his youth, and his father was an iron miner and a union official. He fought to include Davis-Bacon prevailing wage provisions in Federal infrastructure. But he also had a unique side to him that many people were always taken by surprise. This iron ranger spoke French, and that's because he taught French to U.S. Marines for 4 years in Haiti, and he taught English to Haitian military personnel, another way in which Jim Oberstar served our country.

Jim, when I first came here as a Member of Congress, as people have been speaking personally, I came here under bittersweet circumstances. My mentor, my Member of Congress, had passed. When I came here the office had been closed for several weeks. There was no sharing of supplies. There was no one to turn to. I had two big brothers in the delegation who welcomed the first Member in over 50 years to serve here; and so I not only thank you, as a Member of Congress for all the work that you've done, but I thank you for extending all the courtesies you did to me when I first arrived here to make sure that my constituents were well served. But also all the support you've been to me during my personal tragedies.

Thank you, Jim. Jim's unique expertise should be shared with the next generation of public servants. So we're very happy that the *Star Tribune* reported last week that the University of Minnesota Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs is talking to Chairman Oberstar about become a guest lecturer or a seminar leader. I think that would be a terrific thing to have happen. And I hope to see a book written by Chairman Oberstar in the bookstore across the aisle from my congressional office in St. Paul, but I've got a feeling it'll probably be more than one volume.

So Chairman Oberstar, unless you would like to have the last word, we want to thank you for the last time so much for your service.